

REMARKS

Favorable reconsideration of this application, as presently amended and in light of the following discussion, is respectfully requested.

Claims 1, 3-8, 10-20, 22-27, 33, 37, and 43 are currently pending. Claims 2, 9, 21, 28-32, 34-36, 38-42, and 44-73 have been canceled without prejudice; and Claims 1, 8, 12, 14, 20, 23, and 25 have been amended by the present amendment. The changes to the claims are supported by the originally filed specification and do not add new matter.

In the outstanding Office Action, Claims 1, 8, and 20 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Japanese Application No. 11-252364 to Tabata et al. (hereinafter “the ‘364 patent”); and Claims 17-19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the ‘364 patent in view of European Application No. 0606132 to Eschbach (hereinafter “the ‘132 patent”); Claims 2-7, 9-16, and 21-26 were objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form; and Claims 27, 33, 37, and 43 were allowed.

Claim 1 has been amended to incorporate the limitations recited in Claim 2, and Claim 2 has been canceled without prejudice accordingly. Thus, based on the indicated allowability of Claim 2, Applicants respectfully submit that Claim 1 (and dependent Claims 3-7) are in condition for formal allowance.

Claim 8 has been amended to incorporate the limitations recited in Claim 9. Moreover, Claims 12 and 14 have been amended to depend from Claim 8, rather than from Claim 9. Accordingly, based on the indicated allowability of Claim 9, Applicants respectfully submit that amended Claim 8 (and dependent Claims 10-16) are in condition for formal allowance.

Claim 20 has been amended to incorporate the limitations recited in Claim 21. Moreover, Claims 23 and 25 have been amended to depend from Claim 20, rather than from

Claim 21. Accordingly, based on the indicated allowability of Claim 21, Applicants respectfully submit that amended Claim 20 (and dependent Claims 22-26) are in condition for formal allowance.

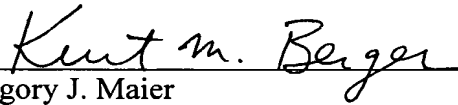
Applicants respectfully submit that rejection of Claims 1, 8, and 20 are rendered moot by the present amendment to those claims. Moreover, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claims 17-19 under 35 U.S.C. § 103 are rendered moot by the present amendment to Claim 8.

Thus, it is respectfully submitted that independent Claims 1, 8, and 20 (and all associated dependent claims) patentably define over any proper combination of the '364 and '132 patents.

Consequently, in view of the present amendment and in light of the above discussion, the outstanding grounds for rejection are believed to have been overcome. The application as amended herewith is believed to be in condition for formal allowance. An early and favorable action to that effect is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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